FACULTY CONTRIBUTORS

On Making A Difference

Joan Weimer

Last spring, only months after Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts on behalf of prisoners of conscience around the world, one of New Jersey's three Amnesty chapters met—as it does monthly—at Drew. We had been assigned a new prisoner to help, a young Pakistani in jail for creating "labor disturbances." Only two people from the Drew community attended that meeting, bolstered by a few faithful workers from surrounding towns. A few Drew students and fewer faculty members had worked on Amnesty campaigns earlier in the year, but they hadn't managed to attend this key meeting.

This fall, an editor of the *Acorn* asked me to help locate the current student leaders of the Women's Collective, or other campus women's organizations. I didn't know who they were, although as chair of the Faculty Affirmative Action Committee I'd sought information from students about discrimination (because of sex, race, religion, age, or anything else) either in or out of the classroom. Why had so few students responded? It would be nice to think that it's because there are no instances of discrimination on the campus, but I'm afraid I don't believe that.

So I began to wonder whether people have ceased to care not only about the injustices suffered by others, but even have ceased to respond to injustices they themselves suffer. Are most of us too numb, too inert, too complacent, too busy to exert ourselves to remedy injustices?

Popular magazines describe us as the "Me Generation," and writers get rich telling us how to be our own best friend or how to look out for Number One. The historian Christopher Lasch has called ours the Age of Narcissism. Lasch claims that we've turned in to ourselves because many of us can't give the old passionate loyalty and faith to politics and religion. I can recognize in myself the dwindling confidence that justice can be achieved through either of those structures. So I've been asking myself why I still care passionately and work actively on behalf o political prisoners and for the women's movement (although not as actively as I feel I should).

No doubt all of us learned as children—those unequal citizens of the family and classroom and neighborhood—how it felt to be victims of injustice. But at some stage, it seems some of us abandoned our struggles for fair treatment even for ourselves. And at some stage, many of us gave up on working for justice for other people. I'd rather think that we got discouraged, not that we ceased to care.

Perhaps what's needed is the chance to succeed, to know that we make a difference. People my age had the chance to learn that in the sixties. In the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, we made concrete gains. The war finally ended (though we couldn't be sure how much effect we'd had on that). The whole climate surrounding race and sex is very different now, so different that many college students don't remember the near-blockade that kept most women and minorities out of participation in society only a decade ago. Of course, all those were very partial victories. Racism and sexism and militarism have not been stopped. The ERA is still not law. Unemployment among Blacks and Hispanics is still rampant. Although we are not at war, our military budget makes one think we must be.

Some of the veterans of those struggles have retreated into their private pursuits, and abandoned activism. But some of us have been permanently changed by discovering that we could make a difference. We couldn't save the world, but we could—by leaning very hard on a problem, a lot of us, at the same time—change some piece of it.

That education in activism was profound and exhilerating. The curriculum is still available in the eighties, for students of all ages who want to sign up.

Amnesty International Group to Meet at Drew

The Madison Area Chapter of Amnesty International, U.S.A., will meet in the University Center, Room 102, on Wednesday, September 26, at 8:00 p.m. All interested people are urged to attend.

Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize last year for its work on behalf of prisoners of conscience around the world—people imprisoned solely because of their convictions. Amnesty chapters, like the one meeting at Drew, receive from researchers in London dossiers on individual prisoners. By writing letters to government officials and by organizing other support in this country and in the country where the prisoner is held—often without charges and without a determined sentence—Amnesty members have been able to save lives, stop torture and obtain release of prisoners.

Amnesty International is a non-political, non-partisan organization. Each chapter (there are only three in New Jersey, hundreds around the world) adopts one prisoner from each of three political blocks: Third World, Communist nations, and industrialized Western countries. The Madison Area chapter has worked on behalf of a young Bolivian, a farmer in Brunei, and a Soviet student—all now free—and is currently working on behalf of prisoners in Ethiopia and a young labor activist in Pakistan.

Questions about Amnesty's work will be answered at the meeting, or call Chapter Coordinator Jonathan Barton at 377-0555. The Chapter needs interested workers to carry on its important activities.

STREETNOISE AT WMNJ

"STREETNOISE", one of the many new programs of radio station WMNJ, will be focusing on current social happenings and news for Drew University. Karyn Dornemann, WMNJ's Publicity Director, urges all campus clubs, living councils, student organizations, and sports organizations to use "Streetnoise" to publicize their upcoming events. All notices should be sent in at least 10 days in advance to allow for proper airing, addressed to Karyn Dornemann, C.M. box 493. Any last minute notices can be called in to WMNJ at 377-4466, ext. 465, or to 966-0855. Please send in notices *now* for airing on October 1st. "Streetnoise" will be heard regularly each broadcast day on WMNJ, 88.9 FM stereo.

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